

why don't you just go by lollercakes

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three times those words were strung together between two people who wanted the opposite

a prompt

why don't you just go

1965

She was exhausted. Her body hurt and her feet were raw as she hiked further down the highway, desperate to get as far as she could from Lonnie's car and the fight that had shattered the perfect world she'd tried to build for herself.

Joyce was 18 and hopeful, having graduated the month prior and angling to get out of this town and leave the mess of her home life behind. But that goal had just gone up in smoke, the fight between her and Lonnie having rattled the car windows until she'd opened the car door while it had still been rolling to a stop. She'd stumbled onto the ground, scraping her knees as her cheek burned from where he'd slapped her.

"Walk home, you stupid bitch," he'd snarled, the words familiar, like they'd come from her step-father and not her boyfriend.

"I hope you crash into a tree," she'd shouted in return as the dust curled up into the sky from his spinning tires. Watching him go, Joyce had almost started to cry, the chance for her to escape this life seemingly too close to let slip by. But she'd steeled her emotions and stood up tall, turning towards home with a newfound determination to do this on her own.

She realized somewhere between midnight and one in the morning that she was much farther from home than she'd expected, her scream into the open sky rousing nothing but birds from their nests. Though she kept walking, the pain crept through her system until it

was at the forefront of her mind, clouding her judgement and bringing tears to her eyes.

So entrenched in her own misery Joyce didn't recognize the car that pulled over across the road, her heart half in her throat expecting it to be Lonnie coming back to apologize. But it wasn't. Of course it wasn't.

"Horowitz?" Jim Hopper shouted from the rolled down window, his engine rumbling loud enough to almost drown him out. Ignoring him, she kept walking. There was no way she could explain this to one of her oldest friends, not without a pitying look that would mix with the rage that he always clamped down when she talked about her boyfriend. "Joyce, what are you doing out at this hour?" He called again, turning off the engine and leaving only the sound of the night between them.

"Out for a walk," she returned, attempting to wave him off.

"What? Woah, slow down," he groaned, jogging to catch up to her. She couldn't look at him. Not now.

"It's nothing Hop, I know you're late for curfew." The words were low and measured as she tried to hold back tears. Where had they come from? She was a strong woman. She didn't cry over a small fight.

"You're out here walking alone and you're worried about my curfew? Jesus Horowitz, your priorities..." He sighed and grabbed for her arm, dropping his hand when she lashed back at him with a slap to

his shoulder that pulled him up short. "What happened to you? Joyce - "

Refusing to back off, he stepped in closer and closed his hands around her shoulders, looking down at her until all the pieces clicked into place and his breathing froze.

"It's nothing," she hissed and shook off his grip, easing away and crossing her arms over her chest.

"It doesn't fucking look like nothing! What happened?" His voice rose an octave until it cracked, the emotions passing across his features - fear, concern, sadness and finally rage - evident even in the low light of the moon.

"Please don't - " she moaned, shaking her head and looking around them for any way to escape from this hell she'd fallen into.

"Come on, I'm driving you back to mine. I've still got that sleeping bag from camp," he added lowly, careful not to scare her off with his insistence. Halfway back to the car, Joyce a step behind him, the reason he was out so late popped her head out of the driver's side window.

"James, my dad is going to kill me. Can we just go already?" Chrissy Carpenter complained, her voice giving away her annoyance at him having stopped to help his friend.

The recognition had pulled Joyce up short. Hopper was not the person she needed right now. She couldn't go back to his place like a broken bird he wanted to take care of. She had to stand on her own two feet. Find her way in the world on her own.

"You know what, I'm almost home. You go on," she said with renewed strength, stopping in the middle of the road and turning on her heel to head in the direction she'd been walking before he'd climbed out of his car.

"That's ridiculous, Joyce. You're clearly in no condition to make decisions tonight," he grumbled, following her until she looked back at him and he froze mid-stride. Her face was a mask, the one she used to hide the horrible shit she dealt with every time she walked through her front door. It was her escape - the way she separated herself from what world she had to live in.

"I don't need you Hopper. Why don't you just go?" She whispered, cold and disengaged.

"James!" Chrissy groaned, honking the horn and shouting obscenities at him until he sighed and ran a hand across his jaw.

"Are you sure you're going to be fine?" He pushed, like he didn't want her to say yes. Like he wanted to do anything other than just walk away from her when she looked like this. Nodding, she turned and started walking once more, careful to keep her sobs to herself until the rumble of his engine disappeared in the opposite direction.

1979

His life had fallen apart in a matter of weeks. The anniversary of Sara's death had collided with the finalization of a bitter divorce, his trip back home to handle his mother's estate having been the cherry on top of a cruel pattern of events.

Sitting in the front row of chairs set up at his mother's grave site, Hopper snuck a sip from his flask as the people dispersed with small whispers of condolences. The sun was bright overhead and he was sweating in his black suit, his tie strangling him until he jerked it loose from his neck.

Hopper said a small prayer of thanks that his father wasn't here to see this, the burden of his sorrow would have been too much to bear. His parents had always been his cornerstone of happiness - their marriage having lasted nearly forty years until his father passed away the year before, his mother following soon after.

It had been a lifetime of hurt since Sara's illness, the sadness having rolled over him until he couldn't escape it. Like ice expanding through a crack in the sidewalk, the memories of Vietnam had worked their way into his subconscious until they too had expanded and blocked out everything that had once been good to him.

"Is anyone sitting here?" The familiar voice of Joyce Horowitz sounded from behind him, the hair on the back of his neck rising as she came around the rows of chairs. "Hunny, why don't you go play for a minute," she adds and Hopper catches sight of the small boy that pokes around her legs to glance at him.

She comes to sit next to him without a response, her small frame hiding in his shadow. Neither of them say a thing, the time between them spanning years and making the conversation dry up before it even starts. If he was being honest, he hadn't heard from her since that night on the road, even despite his attempts when he was drafted to the jungle. For years it had stung, had rubbed him raw that he'd left her behind, but he'd convinced himself in the years since that the drifting apart between them was fate.

Now he wasn't so sure. Maybe it'd all been in the plan.

"I'm sorry about your mom, Hop," she whispered, hands clasped in her lap.

"Thanks," he paused and tucked his flask away to watch the boy wandering between the headstones in the distance.

"His name is Will. I've got another one at home, his name is Jonathan," Joyce added shifting anxiously in her seat. Hopper tried not to notice, ducking his head as he thought about the fact that his friend was happily married with two kids, a life so different from the one he'd imagined for her after seeing her last time all bruised and beaten along the side of a highway.

"I have a daughter," he mumbled in return, fingers digging into his thighs. The adrenaline at the back of his throat bit from the lie, coursing through him hotly until the guilt felt overwhelming.

“Yes, your mother told me. I’m sorry.” He steeled himself at that, sitting up straighter and looking down at the hole before him. That dark hole that stole everything from him. “Would you like to come over for dinner tonight? I have a casserole ready, it just needs to heat up...” She asked and turned to him then, hand reaching out to cover his own and bring him back from the edge.

“Joyce,” he croaked, head hanging and shoulders around his ears.

“Lonnie doesn’t live with us anymore, if that’s what you’re afraid of,” she replied quickly, glancing up at him from behind her lashes. She always did have the longest lashes he’d ever seen. He remembered that from those hot summer nights where they’d laid out on his roof and watched the stars move across the sky.

But he tried not to be distracted by that, Lonnie’s name causing a chill to run down his spine despite the heat of the day.

“You’re still with Lonnie?” It hurt to ask, but the memory of how she’d looked that night flashed angrily in his mind and it slipped out of him before he could pull it back. The words were like a slap, her eyes sinking to the ground as she withdrew her hand.

“I kicked him out. Five months ago,” she hissed, hands clenched in her lap.

“After I saw you on the road... He did that and you went back to him?” He couldn’t stop himself, the questions after all these years finally escaping from him. It wasn’t the time to ask. It wasn’t his place. But his worry for her hadn’t abated... It had just laid dormant.

“Jim.” Her voice rose, her head snapping up to look at him with angry eyes. The flash of it reminded him of who she used to be, the girl who fought against everything like a wild animal. “Please don’t.”

He got to his feet then, shucking off his jacket and stepping angrily away from his chair and the childhood friend who sat beside him. “I can’t do this today. I’m sorry Joyce. Why don’t you just go.”

It caught her off-guard and she recoiled from him, making herself smaller in the chair until abruptly she was standing at the foot of his mother’s grave, her hand resting on the woman’s fresh tombstone.

“You were right, he always was hard-headed,” she said quietly. Turning back to him she smiled softly and then looked towards Will. “Hop... If you need anything, you know where to find me. Come on Will, time to leave.”

He watched her go with a pain in his chest, a loss that cut as she walked once more away from him.

1984+

“Joyce?” Hopper calls out, stepping through the front door and into the living room of the Byers’ residence. Inside he finds the place tidied, the small repairs he made after the events of two years ago

still evident but well hidden.

“Hop? What are you doing here?” Joyce returns, poking her head out from the kitchen. Her hair is frazzled around her face, the colour high in her cheeks as she wipes her hands on her jeans.

“Well, I just dropped El off at the Wheeler’s and figured since Will and Jonathan were already there that maybe you would like some company. It is New Years Eve, after all...” He lets the sentence run out as he steps out of his boots, setting his hat down on the coffee table as she smiles and shakes her head.

“Sure, okay. I was making myself some dinner. You want any?” Hopper nods and joins her in the kitchen, settling into a place at the dining table as she putters around the room. “It’s nothing special, just some potatoes and rosemary chicken I cooked in the skillet.”

“I’m not one to complain, especially because beggars can’t be choosers. I brought some wine,” he adds and sets the bottle on the table. “I figured you could use a drink after the year we’ve had.”

“Ha ha, very funny,” she sighs before reaching into the oven and bringing the dish to the counter. “I will take a double on that though. The boys gave me a run around before they left and I’m just trying to relax and let Will out of my sight for the evening.”

Dinner passes easily between them, the time spent laughing and recounting all the fond memories of growing up. Neither of them mention the hard times, the trying times, from when they’d stuck daggers into each other or walked away without looking back. That

was the past. This was now. And somehow they'd found their way back.

It's later as they sit together on the living room couch, a second bottle having appeared from somewhere and the Time's Square celebrations playing across the TV, that they dissolve into friendly laughter. Somehow in the move from the kitchen to the couch they found themselves creeping closer together, arms brushing and hands lingering in touches they wouldn't fathom anytime else.

"It's almost midnight. Do you have any wishes for the new year?" Hopper asks as he rests his arm across the back of the couch, his knee brushing hers and his hand itching to run through her hair.

"Just for Will and El to have a - a fair go. I want his nightmares to stop... And for El to have the chance to see the world," she replies quietly, wistfully looking between him and the TV. Her words have him reaching out to grab her hand, the hope for not just Will but El too making him sentimental in that moment.

"They will. I promise you they will," he adds, squeezing her hand. Behind them the countdown starts on the TV, the cacophony of voices ringing out as the crowd rouses itself.

It happens before they realize, Hopper slips his hand to the back of her head and leans forward, his lips connecting with hers as the countdown ends. Joyce is the first to pull away, her fingers dragging through his beard as she leans back, eyes closed. When she eventually opens them the frown that furrows her brow sends a chill down his spine, her hand coming up to cover her mouth.

“Joy...” He whispers hoarsely, eyes wide as she moves slowly to her feet and out of his grasp. His heart is thumping wildly in his chest, the blood thick in his veins as he watches her purposely put space between them.

“I - Hopper... Why don’t you just go?” She says weakly, arms wrapped around her waist. He gets to his feet and grabs his hat from the table, stepping towards the door before turning back around to face her.

“No.” He states calmly instead, shaking his head and looking directly at her. “We’ve done this before and we always leave. I’m not leaving this time. There’s too much - I can’t let you go again.”

The silence drags out and Hopper is nearly convinced she’ll push him away again, his body preparing for the disappointment that will crawl through him at her words. But she doesn’t. Instead she steps towards him, her mouth moving with no words coming through. When still she doesn’t say anything and they’re standing toe to toe, he reaches out his arms and pulls her close until his chin is resting on the crown of her head.

“I know my timing is shit. It’s fine. You don’t have to commit to anything now. Just... Let’s not just go when it gets hard. Okay?” He mumbles as they rock together, the sound of the *New Year’s Eve* song playing in the foreground.

“I think I can agree to that,” she replies quietly, her head lifting once more to look him in the eyes. Smiling, she catches his lips with hers in a chaste kiss that promises the world. Neither of them pull away and neither of them let go.